

Peacebuilding Ecology and Personal Transformation in Colombia

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Dedication

In memory of my father, the late Dr Peter Cook, who instilled in me an understanding of the human condition from a biological/evolutionary perspective, laying the foundation for the ideas explored in this dissertation, and to my peacebuilding colleagues in Colombia whose work and kindness showed me the depth of humanity's heart.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines bottom-up peacebuilding in Colombia from the perspective that ecological principles apply to human society. It is framed within a narrative of personal transformation to show the role of reflexivity in stimulating the quest for understanding and knowledge. Colombia is a nation struggling to establish peace after almost six decades of civil war. Top-down peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts have historically been incomplete, politically polarising, and only partially implemented. Meanwhile, myriad bottom-up peacebuilding initiatives emerge within communities. Regarding this as a social phenomenon, I attempt to understand this as a life-affirming pattern by taking an ecological perspective and repositioning human effort as a process of nature seeking a path to homeostasis (balance). The concept of a peacebuilding ecology uses the analogy of a forest ecosystem responding to disturbance. The dominant structure of mature trees represents powerful institutions of governance and economy. The understorey is composed of local non-government organisations (NGOs) and grassroots groups. Within the understorey resilience and creativity flourish in a land of violence. Dominated by the great trees (institutions), however, the understorey is relatively undervalued and overlooked. Using case studies, including a yoga-based peacebuilding model, the role and effectiveness of grassroots peacebuilding is investigated in the context of an ever-adapting Colombian peacebuilding ecology. The research evaluates this ecological model in relation to holistic peacebuilding strategy, while affirming the importance of bottom-up peacebuilding projects in establishing lasting peace with justice. The research is embedded within a narrative of my personal transformation through encounters with Colombian grassroots peacebuilding organisations.

Peacebuilding Ecology and Personal Transformation in Colombia

Hypothesis

In Colombia, a diversity of grassroots peacebuilding projects exists like a dense understorey below the structural canopy of formal national and international peace-making processes. Just as natural ecosystems infinitely evolve and adapt to circumstances, an ecology of peacebuilding appears to have evolved out of need. It seems to have organic qualities of growth and self-generation arising out of the culture, just as natural systems arise out of interaction with their environment. Born out of the resilience and power of the human spirit, this understorey ecosystem responds creatively to disturbance and failure in the overall structure of Colombia's peacebuilding ecology. The life-affirming qualities of this phenomenon are inspirational and generate further positive action as evidenced by the narrative of the author's personal journey.

Research Question

What is meant by an "ecology of peacebuilding", how does it apply to Colombia, and why is this a useful model for understanding the pathway to lasting peace with justice in a war-torn country? How is the author's narrative of transformation relevant to this research?

Methodology

This dissertation uses a flexible, relativist design approach (Robson, 2002). It navigates the intersection of social science traditions applicable to real world research, namely ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory.

Relativism disputes the unchallenged superiority of scientific or quantitative research methods, regarding alternative approaches to research as emerging appropriately from

context. It accepts the subjective as a given, recognising that meaning, behaviour and perceptions of reality arise out of individual experience. From within this contextual experience, relativist research allows that concepts emerge from data, generating working hypotheses (Robson, 2002).

According to Robson (2002), ethnography “seeks to capture, interpret and explain how a group, organisation or community live, experience and makes sense of their lives and their world” (p. 89). Ethnography may involve immersion of the researcher in the cultural group being studied, and is characterised by richly descriptive, reflexive interpretation. In this case, the author’s lived experience in Colombia with colleagues at the coalface of peacebuilding via local NGOs, inspired the research. Consequently, O’Leary’s description of the ethnographic research process as “flexible and emergent” (2021, p. 54), is apt. This has resulted in the use of some informally collected data such as notes made following conversations and meetings, and journal entries.

Time spent in Colombia led to reflection and curiosity about the societal phenomenon of myriad localised and grassroots peacebuilding projects in Colombian communities, both while armed conflict was ongoing and in the aftermath of a 2016 peace agreement. Following a considerable gestation period, a hypothesis applying ecological principles to the situation developed. Ecological principles state that ecosystems are dynamic, not static; that all components of an ecosystem constantly interact; that this interaction preserves the integrity of the system; that regenerative growth follows structural disturbance, and that ecosystems can self-repair (Johnsen & Jorgensen, 1989).

The proliferation of local peacebuilding NGOs in Colombia’s peacebuilding landscape can be conceptualised as being like the understorey of a forest ecosystem in which the trees and canopy are structurally dominant, as are the state and international governance

bodies in society. This powerful heuristic visually and conceptually encapsulates a principle of conflict transformation which is otherwise complex to articulate. Hence, the image becomes a framework supporting the growth of the text.

Considering the emergence of a hypothesis based on a societal phenomenon, the ethnographic qualities of this research intersect with phenomenology. Phenomenology is generally understood as the study of phenomena relating to the subjective experience of an individual or subculture of individuals. It seeks to explore, describe, and explain this phenomenon in a new light (O’Leary, 2021). Acknowledging the reflexivity out of which this dissertation grew, the phenomenon of my own lived experience is an intrinsic element of the document, adding a narrative layer. Varela, Thompson & Rosch (2016) discuss the inclusion and relevance of lived experience in research as “embodied action”.

According to O’Leary (2021), “The key outcome of phenomenological studies is rich, phenomenological descriptions. In fact, the goal is to produce descriptions so full of lush imagery as to allow others to share in how a particular phenomenon is experienced” (p. 158). To this end this dissertation employs language and a narrative voice intended to effectively communicate and embody the principles of the social theory being explored in the hypothesis. Use of the first person is here a device reinforcing my presence in the real world out of which the research grew. It is a conscious subversion of traditional exclusion of the author’s voice under the guise of objectivity.

The smooth merging of formal and informal information sources in the literature reviewed is an aim in the writing of this dissertation. Formal document research and analysis of existing literature has informed the theory of a peacebuilding ecology and the context for its dynamic growth.

Literature on the narrative of transformation includes Andreas Weber (2016), Robin Wall Kimmerer (2020) and Thomas Berry (1999). Each of these thinkers have balanced intellectual rigour with personal revelation, describing how encounters with nature awaken transformative understandings that stimulate questioning of accepted paradigms. By including their narratives of transformation, they have created works that satisfy a wholeness of mind which can be understood variously as head and heart, left and right brain, intellect, and intuition.

Literature on peacebuilding ecology is sparse. The concept is explored by Randall Amster in his book *Peace Ecology* (2016) where he states that:

peace ecology seeks to unite the best practices and insights from both peace and ecology, highlighting fundamental lessons including interconnectedness, holistic thinking, an emphasis on relationships, and the deeply interwoven nature of peace among human communities and peace between humankind collectively and the balance of the environment. (p.34).

Ann Goodman explores the relationship between human ecology and peacebuilding in *Human Ecology as Peacebuilding* (2012). The interdisciplinary nature of a peacebuilding ecology is also developed in the essay *In Search of an Authentic Pax Gaia* (Appolloni and Hrynkow, 2016) by bringing together Thomas Berry's concept of a Pax Gaia (1988) and the work of peace scholar/practitioner Jean Paul Lederach. The writings of German biologist Andreas Weber and social ecologist Murray Bookchin contribute to an understanding of humans and human society as intrinsically functioning within an ecological paradigm. Mac Ginty's (2010) discussion of "hybrid" peace aligns with the principles underpinning the peacebuilding ecology hypothesis explored in this dissertation.

Literature pertaining to the case studies is limited. Research papers and the websites of the case study organisations have been supplemented by personal communications, my travel journal and notes taken during visits to Colombia.

Extensive literature searches have been conducted into academic, media and grey literature relating to theoretical and contextual elements of the research.

Finally, in relation to methodology, the ethnographic and phenomenological elements intersect with grounded theory. A form of relativism, grounded theory allows the research theory to emerge from data collected in the field rather than requiring a firm a priori theoretical starting point (Robson, 2002). This recognises that concepts and hypotheses may arise from fieldwork, rather than fieldwork being predetermined by hypotheses. In this dissertation the hypothesis grew out of my lived experience which is here equivalent to field work. Hence, the hypothesis existed at the outset of the dissertation, rather than emerging during formalised research as it would in a purer approach to grounded research. Whilst elements of grounded theory fit this dissertation, the methodology wasn't consciously applied to data collection and analysis, so there are limitations in using the label. The underlying principle, however, of hypothesis emerging from data is relevant.

The starting point was my communications with Colombian colleagues prior to the research being conceived, and recollections, notes, and journal entries from working visits to Colombia in 2015 and 2017. These "field" notes have supplemented the limited literature available for the case studies which contribute to the data from which the hypothesis is examined. The case study NGOs are Dunna Corporación and PASO Colombia. Their websites, including videos of their work showing and interviewing project participants and support staff, are a primary source material.

According to O’Leary (2021), case study is “a method of studying elements of our social fabric through comprehensive description and analysis of a single situation or case” (p. 227). Case studies are generally understood as a qualitative methodology. O’Leary, however, posits that rather than being a methodology, they are a “unit of study” (p. 151). This dissertation uses two case studies as supportive evidence for the hypothesis that a strong peacebuilding ecology depends on grassroots initiatives growing out of local culture and the resilience of the human spirit, in the manner of a dynamic forest understorey regenerating after disturbance or failure in the forest structure/canopy (i.e. powerful state, economic and international institutions).

Relational Reflexivity

The existing long-term relationships I have with Colombians in their country provided unique opportunities to observe the personalities, motivation, and courage behind the extraordinary innovative peacebuilding achievements of local organisations. These observations gradually transformed into data for analysis within research. Without these relationships, I would not have pursued the peace and conflict studies that have led to this dissertation. The dissertation, therefore, is embedded within a narrative of personal experiences. The place of my observations within the collective knowledge on the topic is explored. What were the experiences that so powerfully affected, inspired, and taught me about courage, conviction, expansive love, and peace? It is these experiences and reflections that motivated the writing of the dissertation.

I see the connections leading to this research as expression of an organic reality in which the inspiration to act is an ever-renewing chain reaction. The result is a creative continuum in humanity’s quest for knowledge, understanding and action for change. This

quest is contextual, relational, and personal. Donati (2010) calls this “relational reflexivity”, stating that it consists of:

the subjects orienting themselves to the reality emerging from their interactions by taking into consideration how this reality is able (has its own powers) to feed back onto the subjects (agents/actors), since it exceeds their individual as well as their aggregate contribution to it by virtue of their personal powers. (p. xvi).

Donati (2010) insists that sociological study must be firmly based on social relation as the “key” to entering, exploring, and exiting subject matter. (p. 14).

A Nod to Goethe

In his 2013 presentation to the New York Academy of Sciences, *Goethe and the Evolution of Science*, Craig Holdrege (1995) declares,

...it is up to us to adapt ourselves to what the phenomena have to show – and not primarily to adapt them to our habitual ways of knowing. Progress in science, in Goethe’s sense, entails changing ourselves, for ‘if we want to behold nature in a living way, we must follow her example and become as mobile and malleable as nature herself. (p. 64).

In relation to this dissertation Goethe’s viewpoint seems fitting, both in terms of style and content, which on reflection I have experienced as, “mobile and malleable.” How? In the metamorphosis from lived experience to research data, hypothesis, in-depth analysis, and the written expression of an idea. Goethe’s scientific method proposed that research should include objective assessment and subjective insight (Harding, 2006), in modern parlance termed “whole brain thinking”. My personal narrative of transformation within this dissertation attempts to achieve this balance.

Introduction: The social forest

In a forest landscape, below the high canopy there is much complexity and diversity in the understorey. This complexity is essential to the stability of the whole system. While the great structural trees of the forest take years to mature and bear fruit, down below are herbaceous species that grow and reproduce in one season, pioneer species that quickly inhabit disturbed patches, flowers that appear after fire, fungi that continually cycle nutrients in the decay of organisms, epiphytes that grow on tree trunks, mosses and lichens covering damp and rocky terrain, creatures of the undergrowth hiding and scratching, creepy crawlies in the soil and bark busy with ceaseless, regenerative activity.

Just so in human society, where the mass of people co-exists “under” the powerful, structural umbrella of governing and economic institutions. Beneath this umbrella, human communities, like the forest understorey, opportunistically respond to conditions, filling vacuums and niches with growth and adaptation through creative strategies for optimising life. The term “grassroots” perfectly captures the equivalent in human society, referring to “the common people, especially as contrasted with or separable from an elite” (www.dictionary.com). Grassroots peacebuilding efforts are initiated and implemented by those who are most directly affected by the conflict (Marshall, 2000). Research shows that women often play a crucial role in grassroots NGOs (Marshall, 2000), although their contribution is often overlooked or undervalued while policy elites dominate decision-making and post-conflict reconstruction.

The myriad grassroots and local peacebuilding NGOs in Colombia grow like irrepressible organisms in an opportunistic understorey, responding with agility to changing conditions, transforming conflict within society and individuals into healing and peace. The ecological importance of the understorey is starkly stated by British environmental writer

George Monbiot (2014) in his largely fruitless search for healthy natural ecosystems in the United Kingdom. He writes, “In mid-Wales, I found, the woods were scarce and, in most cases, dying, as they possessed no understorey” (p.65). In the absence of a strong canopy and healthy understorey, invasion by feral plants (weeds) and animals occurs, suppressing healthy regeneration of a diverse endemic ecosystem. In Colombia, the social equivalent occurs when illegal armed actors fill security vacuums, oppressing vulnerable populations in the absence of effective, protective top-down governance (a healthy forest). A diverse, resilient understorey contributes to protecting an ecosystem from invasive species. Ecologically, there is stability in diversity.

This image of a forest ecosystem to describe a peacebuilding ecology can initially be viewed simply as an analogy to facilitate understanding. In his work on the divided brain, psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist (2019) states that, “Metaphoric thinking is fundamental to our understanding of the world... It is what links language to life” (p. 115). He theorises that the left-brain dominance seen in the modern, Western paradigm devalues right brain activity, to the detriment of modern civilisation. Metaphor is understood in the right hemisphere where holistic understandings are experienced as insights. Weber (2016) states that “human beings think in symbols and metaphors” (p. 6).

In Colombia’s peacebuilding ecology, the mature trees, which dominate and are used to technically define the ecosystem as a forest, are analogous to the state and international institutions involved in peace negotiations, structural pillars, and top-down decision-making. Like the canopy-forming trees, these institutions are highly visible, forming an umbrella which simultaneously shelters, obscures, and may suppress the world below.

With further consideration, however, the imagery can be considered not only as metaphor, but as illustrating an organic reality. The theory of social ecology is a starting point

supporting this view. Ecology studies the interactions of life forms with their environment. Social ecology studies the relationships between people and their environment. In his essay “What is Social Ecology?”, Murray Bookchin (In Boylan, 2013) proposes that the human condition is inherently grounded in natural systems, because humans are natural. He writes, “I have tried to show that nature is always present in the human condition” (p. 71), and sees nature as “essentially creative, directive, mutualistic, fecund, and marked by complementarity” (p. 225). Developing and justifying his theory as more than metaphor or analogy, Bookchin continues:

The ecological principle of unity in diversity grades into a richly mediated social principle, hence my use of the term social ecology... Is this... merely analogic reasoning? My answer would be that it is not a superficial analogy but a deep-seated continuity between nature and society... (p. 67).

Poetic Ecology

The work of German biologist and academic Andreas Weber has led me to a deeper understanding of the peacebuilding ecology concept and the relevance of the forest metaphor as a heuristic communications device. Weber (2016) proposes a paradigmatic shift in biological theory from a mechanistic, Darwinian survival of the fittest world view to one that he terms a “poetic ecology”. Within this theory, the largely unconscious human use of metaphors and symbols from nature to help us think and to lubricate verbal communication is offered as evidence that “we are dependent on the presence of nature as a symbolic mirror or a repertoire reflecting or expressing our inner lives. We gather the food for our thoughts and mental concepts from the natural world” (Weber, 2016, p.6). Due to our fundamental belonging to wild nature, metaphors drawn from nature provide the human mind with smooth pathways to instant, visceral understandings of abstractions, ideas, and meanings. A pertinent

example is the saying that someone focussing on detail at the expense of the bigger picture, “can’t see the forest for the trees.”

The unconscious presence of nature in language is but one expression of holistic biology, in which the primary cause is an urge for life which is rich with feeling and symbiosis, rather than being bound by a simplistic competition for limited resources. Subjective feeling is fundamental to survival, and to this end there is infinite possibility, creativity, and beauty (Weber, 2016).

Positioning human society within this system of life, “the ways of our human world are nothing other than the processes at work in ecosystems of living beings” (Weber, 2016, p. 154). Weber’s view supports Bookchin’s social ecology theory that because humans are part of nature our social patterns follow the principles of nature, validating the suggestion that a self-generating peacebuilding ecology inevitably develops in the absence of peace with justice. By acknowledging this, the peacebuilding paradigm shifts from institutionalised ideas of economic and social development prevalent in the liberal peace model (Mac Ginty 2010) and goes beyond being an ecosystemic metaphor to a recognition that we are organisms existing within the expression of an ongoing dynamic and creative ecology. Encapsulating this idea Weber (2016) states that, “To understand nature in its genuine quality as a system of ecological transformations opens the way to a novel understanding of ourselves, in our biological as well as in our social life” (p.352).

Such a perspective on peacebuilding activity opens the way to a greater understanding and respect for the agility, receptivity and adaptability of smaller-scale, locally initiated projects. At this self-directed, smaller scale, creativity in peacebuilding becomes the norm. Galtung, regarded as the founder and father of peace studies (Galtung and Fischer, 2013), emphasises the primary role of creativity in making peace. Galtung (2004) declares that

conflict is an opportunity for progress and is transformed by using creativity and imagination to navigate a way to peace which is not based on winning and losing.

Galtung's view aligns with Weber's poetic ecology which David Abram (in Weber, 2016) describes as including a "blend of receptivity and spontaneous creativity" through which "any organism orients itself within the world..." (p. xi). In Weber's poetic ecology, Galtung's theory of creativity would be inherently linked with the health and healing of an organism and its environment. A "poetic imagination is a requirement of a healthy system" (p. 315), Weber (2016) says. The healing effect occurs by instilling aliveness, which is defined as creative participation in a continuum of imaginative ecosystem processes.

From these insights we can understand that the instinctive urge for life to flourish amidst the violence of Colombia's protracted conflict gives birth to a vast array of ever-evolving, creative, community-based peacebuilding projects, aptly termed a peacebuilding ecology.

Colombian Context

Colombia has been in a state of civil war since the mid-twentieth century. Multiple armed groups have been involved in violent conflict against the state and civilian population, resulting in at least 450,664 deaths (Truth Commission Report, 2022, "There is a future") and approximately 5.3 million displaced persons (Albuja, 2014). While the conflict originated as a Marxist struggle seeking revolution to transform a political and social system dominated by a privileged elite, it deteriorated into "a bloody struggle over resources: [in which] military, paramilitary, guerrillas, domestic elites and multinational actors vie for control of this resource-rich country [Colombia]" (Theidon, 2007, p. 68).

The main rebel group, known as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), was established in 1966 as a largely rural guerrilla group seizing private

properties in the name of land reform. A smaller left-wing group, the National Liberation Army (ELN), was also founded on revolutionary ideology in reaction to extreme poverty, corruption, and political exclusivity. The activities of these and other guerrillas led to the formation of right-wing paramilitary groups to protect and re-take territory. The identity of the paramilitaries is further complicated by their sometime-relationship with the state as counter-insurgency forces. Extortion, kidnappings, cocaine production and drug trafficking became entrenched methods of funding the various warring parties as the original ideals became subservient to accumulation of wealth and power (Theidon, 2007).

Drug trafficking by rebel groups and drug cartels are recognised as a major factor in the protracted conflict (Espejo-Duarte, 2021). Due to the complexity of the war, multiple peace agreements have been negotiated, each with their own disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes (Avoine & Durán, 2018). In 2016 a landmark peace agreement between the government of President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC was concluded after four years of negotiations in Havana, Cuba (Klobucista & Renwick, 2017).

Titled, the *Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace*, it is a comprehensive and ambitious document laying out rules and guidelines for a set of accords including land reform, political participation, disarmament, reintegration, addressing illicit drug problems, justice for victims and other pertinent issues (Peace Agreement, 2016). The introduction to the accords movingly recognises the horrors of the past, the opportunities of the present and a vision for the future. The language is honest, simple, and direct, providing a succinct summary conveying the reflective, sombre mood of the historic moment when decades of bloodshed and hatred are being brought to a close.

The 2016 peace agreement is worth quoting here in detail as it provides the backdrop for the subject of this dissertation, outlining the aspirational intentions of a top-down peace process:

After a conflict lasting more than half a century, we, the National Government and the FARC-EP, have agreed to put a definitive end to the internal armed conflict.

The conclusion of hostilities will first and foremost represent the end of the enormous suffering that the conflict has caused. Millions of Colombians, men and women alike, have been victims of forced displacement, the dead number in their hundreds of thousands, tens of thousands of people of all kinds have disappeared, and vast numbers of communities have been affected in one way or another throughout the length and breadth of the country, including women, boys, girls and adolescents, rural communities, indigenous peoples, the Afro-Colombian, black, palenquero, raizal and Roma communities, political parties, social and trade-union movements, and economic associations, inter alia. There must be no more victims in Colombia.

Secondly, the end of the conflict will herald a new Chapter in our nation's history. It will be an opportunity to initiate a phase of transition that will contribute to greater territorial integration, greater social inclusion – especially of those who have existed on the fringes of development and have suffered from the conflict – and to strengthening our democracy, bringing it to all corners of the country and ensuring that social conflicts can be resolved through institutional channels, with full guarantees for those taking part in politics.

We must build a stable and long-lasting peace, with the involvement of all Colombian citizens. With this as our objective – putting an end, once and for all, to the historical cycles of violence and laying the bases for peace – we hereby approve the items contained in the Agenda of the General Agreement of August 2012, expounded on in this Agreement. (p. 6).

Colombia faces many challenges in the implementation of its 2016 Peace Agreement. Seven years on, the limitations and failures of the government to fulfill its obligations under the accord are evident. Reflecting Colombia's politically polarised society, in 2018 Ivan Duque was elected president after campaigning against the peace agreement, resulting in delays, under-funding and neglect of key aspects of the deal for the ensuing four years. Concerning this period, Amaya-Panche (2021) notes that the national government's reassuring public discourse is at odds with actual implementation of the peace accord, including "formulating and applying policies that do not correspond with the main points of the agreement" (p.2). Lack of security and the presence of other armed actors including organised crime gangs, mean that violence, insecurity, and killings continue to plague many remote regions (Amaya-Panche, 2021).

In 2022 for the first time, Colombia elected a left-wing President, Gustavo Petro. A former member of the M-19 insurgency which disbanded in 1990, his platform aims for "total peace", requiring negotiations with multiple armed groups, the most significant being the ELN, a left-wing rebel group still engaged in armed struggle (Cobb, 2022). On 26 October 2022, Colombia's congress approved Petro's plan, paving the way for negotiations with illegal armed groups, and on 31 December 2022, Petro announced a six-month ceasefire with the five largest of these (Aljazeera, 2023, "Colombia agrees ceasefire"). At the time of writing, negotiations continue while fragile ceasefires prove difficult to maintain (Aljazeera,

2023, “Colombia suspends rebel ceasefire”) and assassinations of community leaders increase (Aljazeera, 2023, “Colombian activist killings”).

Starting Point: Lived Experience

As the plane bearing me homeward chased the day, I wrote in my journal:

Colombia has made home look rather trivial. I miss Colombia and its people. I have connected with the energy of peacebuilding in a land of strife. It arises from a love which is the only source of peace and is the only force that ultimately replaces cruelty and hatred and disturbance. Non-violence and forgiveness are the counterforces; creativity, compassion and culture are the mediums. (Cushing, Travel journal, 2015).

Gazing out of the plane window on the flight home from South America, I watched the ice flows of Antarctica drift timelessly below. The extraordinary and unexpected sight fit perfectly with an inner excitement that had been dawning within me as the flight hours multiplied on the long haul to Australia. Mesmerised by this encounter with wild, expansive beauty, I felt a lightness of spirit, a sense of self-transcendence as what I saw connected with an inner awakening of freedom.

It was 2015, and I was returning from my first visit to Colombia. I had been hosted by colleagues who had founded a peacebuilding NGO developing creative alternatives to enable psycho-social healing in populations who were most affected by the decades of violent civil war. In contrast, I grew up in a peaceful family in Australia where I now lived in a quiet, middle-class suburb in the remote island state of Tasmania. My most direct experience of war had been a visit to my grandparents in Belfast in 1973 during the Irish Troubles. On the cusp of adolescence, images of tanks in the streets and soldiers with guns at the ready imprinted on my mind. I did not, however, feel fear, safe as I was in the “quiet area” where my pacifist

grandparents lived. Other than that, war was something that happened in history books or on the nightly news in faraway lands.

Leaving Colombia, a land renowned for violence, drug cartels and an entrenched civil war, the courage, creativity, and resilience of the people had touched me in a transformative way. Skimming through the sky above the frozen seas I didn't know what that would mean, or what it would look like in my life. I felt a wondrous curiosity to know what would unfold in my future. Flying through an endless day, that future felt as unreachable as the ice flows below and the crescent moon printed on the pale immensity of sky. The blue softened as it dropped towards the horizon, dissolving into the gentlest pink imaginable, then brightening into ochre drifting into a thin, grey line of cloud, and then horizontal fluff, the cloud snowfield spilling all over the ocean, or is it the ice? I didn't know, I couldn't see through it, just as I couldn't see into the opaque future beyond the sunset, to know which direction my life would take.

As the ice flows receded and the plane flew into the never-ending sunset towards Sydney, I read diary entries and notes I had made in Colombia. In an inspired moment I had scribbled, "Collect stories of grassroots peace efforts in Colombia and make a book. Research what has already been written" (Cushing, 2015, Travel journal) This, it turned out, was my cue. Eight years later, having completed a Graduate Certificate in Peace and Conflict Studies in 2019, this Masters' dissertation is the next step in my attempt to understand, affirm and communicate the efforts of everyday people towards transformation of conflict, enabling peace in individuals, communities, societies, and nations.

Top-Down Peacebuilding: The Forest Trees

So-called top-down, or liberal peacebuilding refers to processes initiated and implemented by powerful national and international structures, including governments,

United Nations agencies and financial institutions (Mac Ginty, 2010). Liberal peace interventions typically occur in societies ravaged by civil war and involve internationally sponsored peace negotiations (Mac Ginty, 2010), such as those that took place between the Colombian government and the FARC rebels. The Colombian Peace negotiations were held in Havana, with Cuba and Norway participating as guarantors, while Chile and Venezuela had roles as observers. Peace envoys from several influential governments and the United Nations attended. Unusually, there was no international mediator: the talks were led by the citizens, including victims, and the government of Colombia (Maldonado, 2017).

Prior to the 2016 Peace Agreement, a series of demobilisations from 2002-2010 resulted in more than 50,000 illegal combatants being granted conditional amnesty and re-entering society (Nussio, 2012). In 2011, the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) was established to provide further structure and resources to oversee and implement these goals. Additionally, in 2011 the Unit for Victims' Assistance and Reparation (the Victims' Unit) was formed and by 2018 had 8.5 million registered victims (Amnesty International, 2018). In 2017, following the Peace Agreement, the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation (ARN) replaced the ACR. These and other national and international agencies compose the structure of top-down peacebuilding in Colombia. They are relevant to the NGOs which are focussed on as case studies in this dissertation.

The dominance of top-down activities, such as peace talks, DDR and political agendas is reinforced by media reporting patterns. According to the theory of peace journalism, there is media bias to reporting on the doings of powerful institutions and their elite representatives, particularly regarding major events and especially, negative events (Lynch and Galtung, 2010). This bias tends to support propaganda and political/economic agendas at the expense of reporting on longer term, community-level processes, and people. Lynch and

Galtung (2010) state that this bias can undermine sustainable peace and prioritise narratives of conflict.

A weakness in the implementation of the top-down model for peacekeeping/building, is susceptibility to a change in government priorities and policy. For example, Amaya-Panche (2021) records that in 2020 Colombia's Congress failed to pass laws that are essential for the democratic and institutional reforms necessary to fulfil the political participation clauses of the Peace Agreement. The protracted Colombian war is an outcome of the inability of the state to comprehensively govern and maintain security nationally, a situation which has not been resolved by the Peace Agreement. From 2016 to 2020, 322 community leaders were murdered. In 2021 the number was 145, and in 2022 the highest annual death toll was recorded with 215 human rights activists and social leaders murdered, largely in rural areas where drug mafias have asserted control after the withdrawal of the FARC (Aljazeera, 2023, "Colombian activist killings").

Add such security failures to the Duque government's policy differences with key aspects of the Peace Agreement, and the shaky foundations of top-down peacebuilding in Colombia in the aftermath of 2016's historic peace deal are quickly exposed. As noted by Mac Ginty (2010), "liberal peace agents are unable to construct neat silos of compliance." He states that they and their structures are "fallible, prone to distraction, and suffer from limitations in budget and capability" (p. 396).

In a peacebuilding ecology, these top-down structures are equivalent to the canopy-forming trees that dominate a forest ecosystem. They are the most visible part of the forest and exert a powerful influence on the entire ecological community. As with powerful institutions, when the great forest trees struggle, fail or fall, the impact is widespread, destructive and opens spaces for opportunistic, possibly invasive, organisms to move in.

Since Colombia's 2016 Peace Agreement, evidence of the social equivalent of invasive organisms can be seen in regions where the FARC demobilisation left a power vacuum which was soon filled by other armed actors, including organised criminal gangs (Amnesty International, Colombia: "Only a robust", 2021). Additionally, there are helpful understory species which can colonise disturbed areas and others which happily co-exist with a forest's structural elements, optimising ecosystem stability through diversity. The social equivalent explored in this dissertation is the grassroots peacebuilding initiatives by local NGOs.

Bottom-Up Peacebuilding: The Understorey

Today, projects initiated by local actors and NGOs are recognised as a vital ingredient in successful peacebuilding, although this was not always so (Gaer in Carey, 2017). Historically, the unique role of local actors was understood and actively encouraged by two visionary United Nations leaders, Dag Hammarskjöld and Sergio Viera de Mello (Gaer, 2017). Hammarskjöld was UN Secretary General from 1953 until his untimely death in 1961 and de Mello served as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2002 until his death by terrorism in 2003. Gaer observes that "Both understood that after signing peace agreements, many countries would lapse back into violence unless there were extra efforts for economic development, security, and reconciliation measures on the ground" (p.xv).

Acknowledging that military peacekeeping was not enough, Hammarskjöld and de Mello actively supported involving local civilian populations in the complex task of pragmatic, sustainable peacebuilding for economic development, security, and reconciliation. They realised that security and human rights are interdependent in peacebuilding and that practical participation by those who had been enemies was needed to stabilise peace in everyday life. According to Gaer, (2017) De Mello "understood the need to gain support for sustainable peace from all components of a post-conflict society" (p. xix). He believed that

the UN should work with NGOs to maximise the power of the local population to control its destiny (Gaer, 2017, p.xvii), exemplifying the view that bottom-up peacebuilding is essential to the goal of sustainable peace. The term “hybrid peace” is now applied to situations in which top-down and bottom-up peacebuilding are both active (Mac Ginty, 2010).

Mac Ginty (2010) describes the dynamism of hybrid peace as a “whirr of hybridity” (p. 404) in which multiple factors interact in myriad contexts on a variety of issues at different times, creating the impression of an evolving dynamic in which institutional and grassroots actors organically come together. He describes a state of flux which may appear chaotic, the many moving parts involving “multiple actors interacting on multiple issues, with no guarantee of consistency” (p. 404), as actions and reactions occur on various fronts. Hybrid peace, he says, happens inevitably within the more static top-down liberal peace model, because of “the complex, multidimensional environment in which it [peace] exists” (p.404). This suggests a dynamic peace organism which is not the outcome out of a bureaucratic “peace strategy”, but rather is born out of the pragmatism, energy, creativity, and love that with a little watering, sprouts abundantly from the fertile soil of communities, as Sergio de Mello ardently observed and believed.

Building on this insight, data analysed by Rettberg (2017) in her study, *1900 Peace Initiatives in Colombia*, points to an increase in grassroots peace initiatives in reaction to intensified violence in the absence of effective State response to the armed conflict (p. 54). According to Amaya-Panche (2021) Colombia has a tradition of local and community-based peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives, stating that an extraordinary collective effort by civilians has evolved in Colombia for protection against violence and to “find a neutral space amidst the violence” (p. 4). Long before the 2016 peace agreement, in a thorough analysis of the reintegration aspect of DDR in Colombia, Theidon (2007) emphasises that local

initiatives and processes are vital in post conflict reconciliation, stating that “reconciliation is forged and lived locally, among families, neighbours and communities.”

The role of civilian peace initiatives in Colombia between 1985 and 2016 is analysed in Rettberg’s research paper. Recognising the role of grassroots projects, the study concludes that post-conflict Colombia will depend on the ability of civil society to be pro-actively involved in peacebuilding projects to create sustainable stability and opportunity.

The diversity, community energy and local knowledge described and analysed by the report illustrate how NGOs and grassroots groups became the vibrant “understorey” of a peacebuilding ecology that evolved within Colombia’s specific cultural, social, economic, and political environments. This approach to peacebuilding supports the proposal of this dissertation that within a peacebuilding ecology, a vibrant, dynamic understorey is key to success and therefore warrants not only resources, but recognition by governments, the media, and the public.

Collective and Historical Trauma in a Peacebuilding Context

The existence of collective and historical trauma needs recognising (Velasco, 2023) in the context of peacebuilding in Colombia due to its effect on individuals and on relationships within communities.

Collective trauma refers to the impact of traumatic experience on an entire society, including victims and perpetrators (Leidner, Hirschberger, & Park. 2023). It does not imply that all individuals suffer from clinical psychological conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), rather that an entire community identifies with a tragic event or events that have caused a social crisis (Velasco, 2023). Social crisis is characterised by communal fear, distrust, and feelings of hopelessness (Cypress, 2021).

In her study of collective trauma in a marginalised ethnic group in Colombia, Velasco (2023) emphasises that collective trauma “reflects a history of violence and land dispossession compounded by enduring inequality that exhausted local abilities to heal and prevent further abuse” (Conclusion, para. 2). While such group trauma can lead to reactions that are deemed maladaptive to peace, a growing body of research points to adaptive attitudes and behaviours that are constructive and proactively support intergroup harmony (Georges, 2023; Exenberger, Steidl, Kamara & Huber, 2022). The term post-traumatic growth (PTG) denotes the relationship between “strength and struggle” (Georges, 2023), in which stressful and traumatising events can lead to positive changes in individuals and collectively (Exenberger et al., 2022). In response to such research, Leidner et al. (2023), propose a framework which assesses the difference between threat- and challenge-induced reactions in intergroup relations following collective trauma. They propose that:

In the context of intergroup conflict, the proposed threat-challenge framework highlights the diversity in possible responses to collective trauma. By shifting from a threat to a challenge mindset, both victim- and perpetrator-group members can transform the past trauma not only to ensure its safety and survival but also to facilitate peaceful conflict resolution and positive intergroup dynamics when faced with contemporary conflicts. (p. 203).

Leidner et al. (2023) also note that maladaptive/adaptive outcomes of the threat/challenge theory are subject to contextual demands and resources affecting the group. The case studies in this dissertation describe organisations that exemplify the power inherent in shifting from a threat to a challenge mindset in a society struggling with collective and intergenerational trauma. This shift supports post-traumatic growth, transforming devastating adversity into an opportunity for discovering inner resources and growing community

cohesion. This process is akin to the irrepressible vigour of forest understorey species thriving and spreading on the ground, and in the cracks and crevices, often hidden from view.

Grassroots inspiration: yoga and pragmatism in the peacebuilding understorey

In 2017, at the invitation of Dunna, I returned to Colombia to make a presentation at an International Conference on Yoga and Mindfulness for Peacebuilding. During my stay I gave a one-day workshop to war victims in a remote region. They were rural people with no prior experience of yoga. I later recalled my impressions in an article for the *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* (Cushing, 2019), writing,

I witnessed first-hand the power of yoga to relieve the pain, sadness, and despair that dwell in the hearts and minds of these civilian men and women who have suffered the atrocities of war for so many years. I also felt the courage and spirit that enable them to endure and be open to healing from a system such as yoga. (p. 261)

It is that courage, spirit of endurance and openness that manifests in the work of the two NGOs described in the case studies, Dunna and PASO Colombia. Just so in the regeneration of damaged biological ecosystems, where equivalent qualities of strength, determination and opportunistic versatility are evident in pioneer species that quickly grow in the first stages of recovery.

My direct experience of the case study NGOs and connection to their founders stimulated my interest in peace and conflict studies. Respect and admiration for the work of my peacebuilding colleagues in Colombia prompted my studies and informs this dissertation. Inherent in this interest is the urge to understand the phenomenon of a people's quest for peace in the context of ecological, or natural principles.

The two case studies illustrate the diversity of expression that emerges from local talent, energy, and the desire to forge pathways to peaceful, resilient communities in societies damaged physically, economically, and psychologically by war. Stability in diversity is an ecological principle which applies to the idea of the vital, grassroots element of a peacebuilding ecology. Dunna Corporación and PASO Colombia are examples of the peacebuilding understorey that grows in a life-affirming attempt to heal the wounds caused by violent disturbance within niche social and cultural ecosystems.

I am reminded of a young woman who participated in a one-day Yoga for Trauma Recovery workshop I held in a remote Colombian village. The yoga workshop, although funded by the Victims' Unit, was the brainchild of locals who knew of my work. We walked along the banks of a jungle-clad river to reach a house built from river stones which the owner had kindly provided for the day. The room was full of men, women, a few teenagers, a cat, and a dog. The faces and bodies of the older people carried the stories of their struggles, as well as their cautious desire for hope and healing. The teenagers were bright and engaged.

In preparation for a guided relaxation practice, each person created a positive resolve to support their transformation towards inner peace. This resolve would be repeated three times at the beginning and end of the guided relaxation practice when the mind was in a suggestible state. A young woman approached me for advice. Through my translator, she explained that her father and many villagers had been murdered when she was fifteen. Now, aged thirty, she worked for the Victims' Unit and realised that her ability to work effectively was compromised by her own traumatic history. She had an idea for a resolve and wanted my opinion. The resolve was, "I am healing my heart so that I can give love to others." Moved by the generosity of spirit her resolve expressed, I assured her that it was quite perfect and asked her permission to share it with the group. When I did, with this and other groups, many people were moved to shed a tear and others asked if they could also use that resolve.

This young woman, while empowered by the resources of the Victims' Unit, was crippled by her traumatic past. Her insight that she could embody the “challenge” mindset (Leidner et al., 2023) within the yoga practice, liberated her from being stuck in the grip of past threat and pain. Organisations such as Dunna, and the friends who organised the workshop I held, perceive the needs of victims such as this woman and respond creatively and compassionately to relieve suffering and thereby empower individuals to contribute to peacebuilding in their communities, forging a path to resilient, sustainable peace.

Dunna is the brainchild of two determined women who started with an idea and a fundraising event. By comparison, PASO Colombia is backed by One Earth Future, an established global philanthropic organisation with a considerable budget. Dunna seeks to become a world leader in developing innovative peacebuilding methods for psychosocial recovery based on yoga and creative dance. By contrast, PASO's peacebuilding is innovative within the more traditional trajectory of community building by strategically supporting economic security and social reintegration of demobilised forces. In the peacebuilding understorey, Dunna and PASO occupy different peacebuilding niches where the vulnerable remain exposed due to the inadequacy of protection from top-down institutions. These organisations are but two examples of the many local peace initiatives that have sprouted from the hearts and minds of Colombians in their quest for peace with justice amidst the terror of violence.

Case Study 1: Dunna Corporación

“Dunna” is a word from the indigenous Colombian Arhuaca language. It describes “the underlying positive dimension of a person that manifests when there is physical, mental and spiritual balance” (Cushing, 2019).

In 2010 María Adelaida López and Natalia Quiñones founded Dunna, a Colombian NGO with the vision of making Colombia a world leader in the use of alternative models for recovery from mental and emotional trauma during the transition from war to peace. Prior to creating Dunna, Ms López attended a four-month yogic studies course at Bihar School of Yoga, India where she learned about rehabilitative applications of Satyananda Yoga™ and was inspired to adapt this form of yoga for psychological healing in demobilised combatants in Colombia (Lefurgey, 2021). Satyananda Yoga™ is a specific form of yoga that integrates yoga postures, breathing, deep relaxation and meditation (Saraswati, 2008).

Recognising the need for alternative, cost-effective mental health strategies to support peacebuilding, Dunna researches and develops the application of yoga and creative dance models for targeted groups, including ex-combatants, war victims, youth in detention, female survivors of sexual abuse, imprisoned war veterans and displaced people living in extreme poverty (Lefurgey, 2021).

Knowing that I was teaching Satyananda Yoga™ to war veterans in Australia, Ms López contacted me when she was preparing protocols for a pilot program in 2010. Ms López asked if I would review the session plans for a randomised-controlled trial (RCT) in Bogota assessing the efficacy of Satyananda Yoga™ for the reduction of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in demobilised irregular armed groups (Quiñones, N., Maquet, Y., Vélez, D., & López, M., 2015). If successful, it was hoped that the yoga course could form part of a psychosocial reintegration pathway that the participants were required to complete under amnesty conditions. Post-conflict psychosocial healing involves supporting and promoting psychological and social healing in individuals, families and communities (Gutlove & Thompson, 2004, p.136), and is recognised as an essential element of peacebuilding. This original pilot, *Ahimsa: Yoga for Reconciliation*, succeeded in demonstrating significant reduction in PTSD symptoms, providing an evidence base enabling

funding to be secured for national expansion (Quiñones et al. 2015). “Ahimsa” is a Sanskrit word meaning “nonviolence” or “nonharming” (Feuerstein, 2007), and is a fundamental element of yogic culture (Satyananda, 1989).

Once established, Dunna’s work diversified both in terms of target groups and therapeutic approach, always including research to evaluate their interventions and develop an evidence base to support expansion and satisfy funding partners. The goal of leading the world in innovative, alternative models for peacebuilding is built on a solid base of praxis and evidence (Cushing, 2019). Research partners and sponsors include universities, corporations, Colombian government agencies and ministries, municipal government offices, the Netherlands Embassy, the UN Multi-donor Fund for Sustained Peace in Colombia, and the Boston Centre for Trauma and Embodiment (www.dunna.org/home-english/).

Lefurgey (2021) identifies Dunna as exemplifying the principles of elicitive peacebuilding according to Lederach (1995). Lederach’s elicitive peace model focuses on involving and empowering local people to build self-determined pathways to conflict transformation based on local knowledge and culture. Lefurgey (2021) notes that although yoga has its origins in the spiritual culture of India, Dunna’s yoga programs are adapted to be culturally appropriate and to address the needs of each specific target group in various peacebuilding contexts. She observes that, “This dynamic allows for the possibility to connect to the very human and interpersonal dimensions of conflicts that can be overlooked in large-scale peacebuilding projects that are often global north exports” (p.74). As locals who have an embedded cultural understanding of their country and have experienced the conflict themselves, the organisers are sensitive and responsive to circumstances. This, and the flexibility that independence allows, enables them to customise programs to optimise outcomes.

Dunna's Programs and Activities. Dunna's activities are grouped under the categories of yoga, dance and movement, restorative practices, research, and training (www.dunna.org/home-english/).

Yoga Programs. Based on Satyananda Yoga™ and trauma sensitive yoga principles, the yoga programs aim to promote recovery from traumatic experiences and emotional suffering and to strengthen the social fabric of communities which have experienced high levels of violence during the conflict (www.dunna.org/yoga-eng-2/). Therapeutically, yoga integrates practices for the body and mind, rebalancing the nervous system to enable deep states of relaxation and calm (Cushing, 2015). In Galtung's book, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (1996), he emphasises the need for states of inner peace, described as harmony of body, mind and spirit, qualities which are identical to the goal of yoga (Cushing, 2019). Yoga programs are modified to suit each target group as detailed below. Teachers are required to have at least ten years' experience of Satyananda Yoga™ (Cushing, 2019).

Ahimsa: Yoga for Reconciliation. Demobilised guerrilla and paramilitary combatants diagnosed with PTSD who were completing rehabilitation requirements under amnesty conditions were targeted for this first Dunna program offered from 2010-14. It was held in six population centres which had experienced high levels of violence. An RCT demonstrated that Satyananda Yoga™ was as effective as standard medical intervention at less cost and without the side effects of psychiatric medication (Quiñones et al. 2015). The study, "Efficacy of a Satyananda Yoga Intervention for Reintegrating Adults Diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder", was published in the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* in 2015.

I met a teacher who had worked with demobilised persons participating in *Ahimsa: Yoga for Reconciliation* in the province of Armenia. Impressed with the dedication of the group, she spoke of confronting her own conditioning to see through stereotypes and be

comfortable with people of this type. She found it extremely rewarding to see people who had been through so many horrors able to relax, including a man whose legs had been blown off by a landmine. There was a family attending together – a mother and father with their child between them. One woman who had been defensive, aggressive, and resistant to attending wrote a letter of thanks saying that she liked the classes, that they helped her control her stress and impatience and she wished to attend more yoga. Her counsellors reported significant positive change during the course. (Cushing, Travel journal, 2015).

A female participant commented that, “Yoga is a wonderful present that helps people like us who have a heart-felt crisis, whose soul and spirit hurts. We have come to heal. This is a soul-healing process” (Dunna, 2011, “Ahimsa: Yoga for reconciliation”).

Ahimsa: Yoga for Reparations. This intervention aimed to reduce emotional suffering and contribute to restoring the social fabric of communities affected by violence and displacement. Commencing in 2013, 400 registered war victims participated in nine municipalities. A study including a control group was conducted by the psychology department of Universidad de Los Andes (University of Los Andes). The results show that the yoga program reduced depression, sadness, anger, and fear, improved self-efficacy, sense of agency and emotion regulation, and strengthened active coping mechanisms in participants (Agudelo, Gómez, Sepúlveda, Quiñones. n.d.).

I met a teacher with 40 years’ experience who described working for Dunna as his most meaningful teaching experience, bringing both joy and anguish. He recalled a student whose brother and other family members had been killed in a massacre. As a result, the student had no interest in life. After attending yoga classes, he felt happy with his family again and could function socially. He could even sit and talk with the killer of his brother and was teaching simple yoga postures to colleagues at work (Cushing, Travel journal, 2015).

This teacher also remembered a woman who went to hospital every day due to pain. After the yoga course she said, “I have forgotten the way to the hospital.” (Cushing, Travel journal, 2015).

A participant commented, “I was depressed, so much so that I thought I wanted to die, and planned my death... thank God and yoga, my episodes of depression don’t last so long anymore... this is why I keep doing yoga” (Agudelo et al. n.d.).

Santosha: Yoga for Peaceful Co-Existence at School. Santosha is a Sanskrit word meaning “contentment” (Sanskrit Glossary, 2007). This study involved children and adolescents from violent and low-income backgrounds. The program used Satyananda Yoga™ with the aim of reducing bullying, violence and stress responses while promoting healthy togetherness at school. Levels of anxiety, depression, aggression, and certain socioemotional competencies were quantitatively assessed before and after the intervention. Qualitative data was also collected. Results showed significant reduction in anxiety in particular (Velasquez, Lopez, Quinones, & Paba, 2015).

A participant commented, “When I’m angry I remember the moments in which I can breathe. This helps me to control my anger and not take things further.” (Dunna, 2018, “Santosha: Yoga for Coexistence”).

Shakti Program: Yoga for the Emotional Recovery of Female Victims. Shakti is Sanskrit for the female energy or power in nature (Sanskrit Glossary, 2007). This program was held in the city of Medellin with the support of the mayor’s office and the Bolivar Davivienda Foundation. As part of a municipal project titled “Women: Memories of War, Protagonists of Peace”, it aimed to support the emotional recovery of women victims of violence to help build a culture of peace. Evaluation was by the Pontifica Bolivariana University (Dunna, n.d., “Yoga”)

I met a teacher who recalled a class she taught as part of the Shakti Program. She spoke of a group who were female survivors of sexual abuse, although this selection criterion was not acknowledged due to the stigma attached. She said that the yoga classes enabled the women to feel “empowered, functional, and strong”. The teacher herself was deeply affected by the experience, recognising the “cruel reality in her country” (Cushing, Travel journal, 2015).

Shanti Program: Youths in Juvenile Detention Using Yoga and Urban Dance.

Shanti is Sanskrit for “peace” (Sanskrit Glossary, 2007). From 2015, the Shanti Program was held in nine cities with youths in juvenile detention and their families. Participants achieved lowered aggression, depression and stress scores and developed skills for improved emotion regulation, self-care, and wellbeing (Dunna, n.d., “Yoga”).

A participant commented, “It [the Shanti program] changed my life. I’ve stopped being an intolerant and aggressive person. I’m happier and calmer now” (Dunna, n.d., “Shanti Program”).

Viveka Program: Yoga for Co-Existence. Viveka is Sanskrit for discernment, right knowledge or understanding (Sanskrit Glossary, 2007). The Viveka Program was held in Santa Marta in a housing complex provided by the government for displaced persons, with the aim of reducing violence and strengthening the social fabric of the community. The program consisted of 20 yoga classes held twice a week for 12 weeks. Participants were encouraged to practice at home with the aid of a CD and booklet. The program aimed to “identify perceived changes in aggressiveness, interpersonal relationships, and stress after participating in the yoga sessions” (Lievano-Karim, 2019, p. 32). Participant comments give insights into the effects of the yoga: (Dunna, n.d., “Viveka Program”)

“I used to yell at my children. Now I don’t yell, I speak.”

“You forget all your problems, all the suffering and conflict.”

“I would like [yoga] to be available for other people... so that they don't become people who live with anger, or who spend time fighting, practising yoga is really good, and it would heal them.”

Data revealed positive outcomes in violence reduction and enhanced wellbeing. The researcher concluded that, “Yoga may be an effective violence-reduction strategy because it enhances individuals' physical and emotional well-being” (Lievano-Karim, 2019, p. 40).

Creative Dance and Movement Programs. Creative dance and movement programs recognise that experiences are stored in the body and can be expressed and liberated somatically. Trauma-related emotions that cannot be verbalised (Herman, 2015), can be transformed, and healed through movement and dance. These programs are also cultural, recognising that Colombia's war has caused cultural impoverishment in marginalised communities where dance was previously important.

Dancing for Peace Pilot Program 2010. The purpose of this pilot was to determine the effectiveness of dance and movement psychotherapy in reducing anxiety and depression in teenagers from vulnerable populations. Seventy teenagers attended creative movement sessions for three months in Cartagena. Results showed a 45% reduction in anxiety and depression symptoms (Dunna, n.d. “Dance and Movement”). Participants comments express their positive transformations: (Dunna, n.d., “Dance and Movement”)

“It's easier to talk, understand one another; tolerance, respect, everything is easier.”

“The workshop really improved my relationships with other people.”

“I used to be very rude, disagreeable, I couldn't get on with anybody. Well, I've changed a lot.”

Training in Dance and Movement Psychotherapy as a Tool for Reconciliation.

Training for dance teachers to use dance and movement psychotherapy focussed on creating safe and inclusive teaching environments, enabling students to develop healthy relationships with their bodies and learn how to express their inner world through the body as a means of release and healing. The provision of dance and movement psychotherapy aims to reduce violence and offers a form of reparation in vulnerable communities. Participant teachers' comments validate the importance of body-inclusive therapy: (Dunna, n.d., "Dance and Movement")

"The body helps to express the inner world of the human being. The body is used as a metaphor for the inner world. It clarifies and symbolizes emotions and thoughts that can be difficult to express verbally."

"Dance and movement psychotherapy is a therapeutic tool used to integrate the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social part of the human being using the body, movement, and dance."

"It is also about an educational process in relation to the trauma and how it disintegrates the human being and the integration processes through mind-body interventions."

Certificate in Body, Dance and Movement for Victims and Vulnerable Persons. A more extensive, deeper training was developed for teachers and community leaders in regions directly affected by the armed conflict. The transformation of suffering and strengthening of inner resources and resilience enhance peaceful coexistence and rebuilding of the social fabric. A participant commented that, "the body speaks, the body expresses emotions; through the movements of the body, one tells one's story" (Dunna, n.d., "Dance and Movement").

Restorative Justice Programs. Restorative justice programs support transition from punitive to restorative practice in juvenile justice, family violence and post-conflict justice (Dunna, n.d., “Restorative Practices”).

Bunischari Project: Diploma in Tools for Strengthening Community Reconciliation and Reconstruction. A pilot program pioneering the integration of mind-body strategies with restorative justice practices to rebuild trust, reduce stigmatisation and build collective effectiveness in municipalities which experienced high levels of violence in the armed conflict. The reconciliation process brought together victims and perpetrator ex-combatants who applied learned skills through practical projects together – constructing an eco-trail, a plant nursery, and a community garden (Dunna, n.d., “Restorative Practices”).

This participant’s comment illustrates the everyday nature of an individual’s experience of peace: “We have known each other forever. Now they are my neighbours and I sell them vegetables and pig feed. We do not forget what they did to us, but we accept their repentance” (Culture of Peace News Network, Colombia: Peacebuilding in Viota, 2022).

Restorative Juvenile Justice Program. Commencing in 2021, Dunna participated in the Local and Rural Justice Models project in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Dunna was involved with implementation of the Restorative Juvenile Justice Program, developing caring processes and moving away from the punitive model (Dunna, n.d., “Restorative Practices”).

Diploma Program in Restorative Practices. This training is for people working with adolescents in the Criminal Responsibility System for Adolescents (SRPA). They are trained in conflict resolution, communication, emotional and cognitive skills to enable more effective implementation of restorative justice goals to be more dynamic, participatory, and inclusive (Dunna, n.d., “Restorative Practices”).

Research. In Dunna’s research, all protocols are evaluated by independent third parties with the aim to prepare data for publication (Dunna, n.d., “Research”). Dunna’s research on their 2010 debut program, “Ahimsa: Yoga for Reconciliation”, conducted in partnership with Los Andes University psychology department and psychiatrist Dr Jose Posada Villa (Cushing, 2019), was published in the International Journal of Yoga Therapy (2015) under the title, *Satyananda Yoga Intervention for Reintegrating Adults Diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*. The RCT of this pilot set the standard for ongoing data collection and analysis of Dunna programs.

Research initiated by outside researchers in collaboration with Dunna is also significant. Lefurgey’s doctoral thesis, *Yoga as Embodied Peacebuilding: Moving through Personal, Interpersonal and Collective Trauma(s) in Post-Conflict Colombia*, includes an in-depth study of Dunna’s work, concluding that “the success of their efforts in Colombia suggests that future and further peacebuilding processes need to be highly sensitive to the local context, which requires time, effort and a bottom-up, grassroots-informed process” (p. 206). Liévano-Karim (2019) and Wong (2022) completed Masters’ theses on specific Dunna projects.

Training. Training provides opportunities for participants from marginalised, vulnerable populations to become providers within their own communities, empowering them socially and economically while enabling sustainability and independent continuity of the programs (Dunna, n.d., “Training”).

Training in Trauma Sensitive Yoga. In association with the Centre for Trauma and Embodiment, Boston, Dunna offer workshops for yoga teachers in trauma sensitive yoga. Training includes understanding the effects of trauma on the nervous system and how to use yoga practices to restore balance (Dunna, n.d., “Training”).

Training for Victims and Vulnerable Persons as Yoga Instructors. Available to participants in Dunna’s yoga programs who show strong interest and commitment, training is provided in basic yoga teaching, enabling graduates to teach in their own communities. Individuals gain a meaningful work skill and vulnerable communities have a more sustainable yoga model (Dunna, n.d., “Training”).

The Dunna Ecosystem: A Vibrant Understorey Healing a Damaged Forest

The diversity of Dunna programs developed from 2010 to the present exemplifies the principle of a bottom-up peacebuilding ecology stimulated by disturbance and characterised by an agility enabling responsive adaptation to evolving community need. It is fair to say that such innovative projects would not have been instigated within the top-down, bureaucratic paradigm that characterises official peacebuilding. Lefurgey (2018) notes that peacebuilding projects using yoga are generally on the periphery of state-sanctioned peacebuilding programs such as truth commissions.

Data collection, analysis, and publishing in partnership with academics continues as a key strategy in successive Dunna projects, providing the evidence base needed to satisfy funding sources and validate expansion of services. Additionally, the calibre of their work has attracted outside researchers, notably then PhD candidate M. Lefurgey from the University of Western Ontario. Lefurgey’s article, *Yoga in Transition: Exploring the Rise of Yoga in Peacebuilding* (2018) notes the quality of Dunna’s praxis and research in the field globally, and observes that, “local community actors are leading yoga projects, without the funds, directions, and policy aims of Global North peacebuilding entities—a large step in addressing the shortcomings of the peacebuilding on an international scale” (p. 267).

The simple words of the teachers and participants quoted above, tells yet another story, revealing how structural and cultural barriers, divides and prejudices dissolved in the

context of the yoga classes. The nonviolent culture of yoga is shown to be self-perpetuating (Cushing, 2016), exemplifying Galtung's theory of creating "peace by peaceful means" (Galtung, 1996). Stereotypes transform into individuals. Truths emerge. Killers are forgiven and befriended. Aspirations develop. Hope is kindled. The opportunity for participants to become yoga teachers in their own community sows seeds of sustainability, independence, and regenerative healing – characteristics of a healthy natural ecosystem.

Reflecting on such observations, I flip through my travel journal, discovering a moment in Colombia where I transcended my stereotyped perception of hired assassins, recognising their vulnerability due to the structural violence of poverty. In May 2015, following a conversation with one of the yoga teachers I stayed with in Medellin, I wrote:

Medellin – where 15-year-old boys rode pillion on motorcycles to assassinate any who threatened the power and life of Pablo Escobar. They shot for the price of a refrigerator, a gift for their mother, after praying to the Virgin Mary, prepared to die to help with a gift for their mama. Hired killers, or devoted sons? (Cushing, Travel journal, 2015).

Case Study 2: Paso Colombia

Paz Sostenible para Colombia (Sustainable Peace for Colombia), known as PASO Colombia (PASO) is the Colombian arm of One Earth Future (OEF), a United States based philanthropic organisation describing itself as an incubator of "innovative peace programs, working hand-in-hand with communities to eliminate the root causes of war." (One Earth Future. (2023). "Sustainable Peace is Possible"). OEF bases its programs on a theory of peace which is clearly articulated in a document titled, *Architecture of Peace: OEF's theories of war and peace* (updated 2020), available on its website. Key to OEF's peace theory is the understanding that "structural drivers of conflict" must be addressed by supporting human

development and good governance using evidence-based analysis and practice. PASO's specific mission is to "identify and develop economic opportunities within communities affected by armed conflict." (Cifras & Conceptos, n.d. "ERAs satisfaction and perception survey").

Following the demobilisation of the FARC guerrillas in 2016, the need to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants into rural communities which had experienced high levels of violence became a peacebuilding priority for PASO Colombia. The building of Rural Alternative Schools (ERAs) in 22 communities became the foundation for PASO's three peacebuilding pillars: building community, building markets and sustainable production. The ERAs are collaboration centres that bring together peasant communities, ex-combatants, war victims, Venezuelan migrants, NGOs, public and private entities, and international organisations. Guided by PASO, training, production, and networking are channelled and structured into realisable projects (www.pasocolombia.org/en).

Paso Activities

Alternative Rural Schools and Collaborative Commercial Partnerships. Each ERA provides a focal point for PASO's activities. Community building is the first step in developing a project. Consultation and establishing trust are priorities that create a strong foundation for the relationship which will underpin future projects. PASO staff known as "extensionistas" – extension workers – facilitate ERA programs, customising the training and projects according to individual community needs. ERA participant Briceida Lemos describes the culture of trust fostered by the schools, saying, "Nothing is imposed upon us. There are always gatherings for making decisions on what will be strengthened. That makes us feel heard. Because there's more trust." (PASO Colombia, (2023). "Building Community").

In evaluating five years of peacebuilding in communities, PASO concluded that Colombia's main asset is its people. Once trusting relationships exist, building markets is the next step in creating economies which support peace. The ERA's enable resource collaboration to develop financially viable projects by bringing together land, knowledge, labour, capital, and markets. From these connections, PASO facilitates Collaborative Commercial Partnerships (CCPs) between local producers, national and international markets, and investors. According to PASO, "These partnership networks reduce investment risk, ensure fair selling prices, guarantee and strengthen technical knowledge, develop social and business fabric, and strengthen governance for territorial peace." (PASO Colombia. (2023). "Rural alternative schools.")

Data Collection and Analysis. Through the ERAs and CCPs, 2,370 jobs have been created and USD\$11.5 million worth of trade agreements have been generated. Building sustainability into these successes is PASO's third pillar. Since 2018, an independent firm, Cifras & Conceptos, has conducted annual surveys to evaluate PASO's operational model. Ex-combatants and campesinos (rural peasants) participating in the ERAs are surveyed. The survey analyses data from four indicators: 1. Social and Territorial Integration 2. Economic Capital 3. Resilience 4. Future Perspectives on the Reintegration Process (PASO Colombia. (2021). "Survey results.")

The surveys have enabled PASO to track the impact of their work on certain key issues. The success of the ERAs in trust building to create stronger communities is confirmed by the survey data, supporting the ERAs methodology of learning by doing through collaborative projects with productive outcomes. Data from surveys taken in 2018, 2019 and 2020 show that 71% of community members improved their trust in ex-combatants, while 82% of ex-combatants improved their trust in community members. Trust in PASO increased in 89% of respondents while trust in other NGOs increased by 61%. This trust is regarded as

a vital foundation not only for project success but also for the positive relationships within communities that restores social cohesion after the divisions caused by decades of violence.

PASO believes that these impressive outcomes have been achieved due to the evolution of a model that departs from two rationales traditionally applied to supporting recovery in rural areas affected by armed conflict.

- 1) Instead of adopting the aid model which treats people as beneficiaries, PASO works with participants as partners.
- 2) In contrast to the model of individual entrepreneurship which results in competitiveness, PASO's ERAs use associative models which facilitate cooperation to support scaled economies and shared problem-solving.

The collaborative atmosphere nurtured by the extension workers creates virtuous circles, building self-confidence, shared solutions, communication, and conflict resolving skills. Time spent together in the ERAs fosters security,\

with 66% of people surveyed saying they felt safer inside the ERA, an important factor for communities accustomed to hostility and high levels of personal risk in daily life. PASO states simply that “spending time together is transformative” and defines its ERAs as “paradigm-shifting spaces for information and interpersonal relationships” (PASO Colombia. (2023). “Rural alternative schools.”).

Within the safe haven of the ERAs, a carefully guided peacebuilding process is managed by PASO staff. This succinct description describes the process behind the impact of ERAs:

In them [ERAs], participants establish key relationships to achieve integration around territorial peace with the international community, private institutions, government entities and other communities in the region. And this relationship serves as a meeting

point for the creation of new projects or the mobilization of those that were stagnant. For this, a series of interconnected actions are deployed, starting from the most personal elements, such as trust among neighbours or self-perceptions of risk, and getting to the consolidation of productive projects whose economic impact reaches different associations, cooperatives, or regions (PASO Colombia. (2023). “Rural alternative schools.”).

CCPs grow out of the training, networking and project development that occurs in the ERAs. Commercial partnership agreements between ERA participants and external businesses have been established in a range of rural industries including coffee, organic animal feed, fish farming, honey production, egg production and tabasco chili peppers. The grassroots-positive agreements variously guarantee markets and prices, including international coffee export, value-adding, for example local coffee drying and roasting to export quality, and bringing small-scale producers into cooperatives. PASO and other organisations provide financial, technical, and administrative expertise to enable the partnerships and ensure that the needs of local producers are met. Partner organisations include the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office for Sustaining Peace in Colombia, United Nations Development Program, Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization, National Coffee Growers Federation, Vice-minister of agricultural affairs and a range of Colombian businesses (pasocolombia.org/en). The CCPs provide economic sophistication and certainty for the campesinos and reintegrating ex-combatants on their path from war to peace.

Supporting Substitution of Illicit Crops. The 2016 Peace Agreement recognises that Colombia’s significant production of cocaine as a means of financing rebel armies and entrenching organised criminal activity contributes to “undermining values and peaceful

coexistence and has constituted a factor that harms the possibility of progressing towards social inclusion, equality of opportunity between men and women and the expansion of democracy” (p. 105). Assisting 99,000 registered families, known as cocaleros, to transition out of coca production (the plant material used in making cocaine) is an element of the overall strategy outlined in the Peace Agreement to address the problem. To this end the National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS) was established.

In 2021, Amaya-Panche stated that the PNIS program had made little progress, noting “the increasing frustration of farmers who committed to substitution at the local level but who have not been provided with alternative means of subsistence or earning their livelihood” (p. 3). She also reported poor participation rates, violence against beneficiaries of the government program, delays in implementation, under resourcing and consequent reduced community trust in the government.

According to a report by the University of Notre Dame (Meyer Business on the Frontlines Program, 2020), despite USD\$1.6 billion spent in the first two years of the program, coca production increased by sixteen percent. Observing the failure of the PNIS strategy of providing compensation without support to establish an alternative income, the report notes that Colombia’s diversity of geography, culture and market access mean that territorial and localised solutions are fundamental for the long-term success of crop substitution. The report recognises top-down failure and recommends a bottom-up solution. In the language of a peacebuilding ecology, the solution is in supporting a diverse forest understorey. The concept provides a heuristic device with which to understand and engage with the issue as a social principle inherent in peacebuilding, not only in this circumstance. PASO found a way of sowing seeds and fertilising the understorey.

Recognising that sustainable peace in Colombia depends on successful crop substitution for both farmers and ex-combatants, in 2019 PASO designed a contingency plan (CRP) to support families registered with the PNIS. The plan provides income for a transition period of community service and on-the-job training, making use of the ERA infrastructure already in place. The frontline role of extension workers ensures that the social and economic starting point for a project is born not only out of the problems facing cococaleros, but also out of their ideas and dreams (Meyer Business on the Frontlines Program, 2020). Inclusion of women is a priority, captured in the project title *Women Seeding Peace*. Eighty percent out of 1,968 CRP participants in ten municipalities, have been women, enabled by the provision of childcare. An increase in average household incomes from US\$97 to US\$237 ensure the long-term viability of crop substitution and the improved lifestyle that this implies (PASO, (2023). “Key Achievements of CRP.”).

Integrating Venezuelan Migrants and the Brotherhood ERAs. It is estimated in 2022 that up to 2.5 million Venezuelan migrants escaping economic and social collapse have settled in Colombia (Crisis Group, (n.d.). “Latin America.”). While the Colombian government has technically welcomed them and offered some support, these migrants are vulnerable to recruitment and exploitation by criminal organisations operating in border regions. In response to the crisis, PASO has developed projects which go beyond humanitarian aid to facilitating productive collaboration between migrants and vulnerable Colombians.

In partnership with Aid Live Foundation, PASO created a Brotherhood ERA in the Saravena municipality. The project focussed on establishing community gardens and kitchens to grow and provide food, especially to children. 30 Community Mothers were paid to prepare meals for 500 undernourished school children. 60 Community Mothers and Fathers

were trained in urban agriculture, developing 36 community gardens. Food from the gardens is distributed amongst families and excess is sold at local markets. The short video *Urban Gardens for Peace: from Rioting to Sowing* captures the story of young people involved in anti-government protests in the city of Cali. With the support of PASO, they realise that they can help themselves and their families by coming together to grow and share food alongside displaced persons and women from *Healing Wounds*, a group supporting women victims of the armed conflict. (PASO Colombia. (2023). “Migrants, prosperity and employment.”)

Since 2021, in alliance with the Inter-American Development Bank, PASO has been developing a project to create opportunities for socio-economic inclusion of Venezuelan migrants and vulnerable Colombian locals. 1,000 participants have been involved in agricultural training while improving infrastructure to empower peasant cooperatives and associations in collaborative production and marketing.

Paso Magic

The Meyer Business on the Frontlines report describes PASO’s grassroots approach as “PASO magic” (p.9). This magic “embodies partnership, collaboration and support” (p. 9) respecting the dignity, worth and hope of individuals and communities. The report quotes a participant, “PASO treats us like human beings. For a long time, no-one else had done that” (p.9). In conclusion the report notes:

The final piece of PASO’s magic is the end goal. While many organizations serve their beneficiaries for an extended time, PASO looks to create graduates who remain part of a family but do not constantly rely on PASO for livelihoods and success. (p. 10)

The “PASO magic” reflects the holistic, community-oriented philosophy instilled by PASO director Juan Fernando Lucio. I met Juan Fernando in 2015 on my first visit to Colombia. Not yet employed by PASO, he was searching for a way of moving into peacebuilding work. Juan was educated internationally in economics, theology and social science, and is a man of deep faith and conviction. When I returned in 2017, Juan kindly introduced me to his work with PASO, based in Cali, a city renowned for organised crime and a gangster subculture.

Through Juan I had a glimpse into the seriousness of PASO’s work, the sensitivities and danger of the times as he engaged with communities where FARC guerrilla were in the process of disarming and reintegrating.

Reflection and Conclusion: Breezes of Peace

In 2016 I published a book on yoga for trauma recovery including insights from Dunna’s work. Titled *Hope: how yoga heals the scars of trauma*, I worked on a draft while in Colombia. I was in Cartagena, famous for its old city, a World Heritage listed colonial enchantment enclosed protectively by a massive, defensive wall – this Caribbean coast had been pirate territory. My apartment wasn’t in the fairy-tale part of Cartagena, however. It was in a bland skyscraper overlooking a sad tourist beach. I went for walks to relieve the mental intensity of book writing. A journal entry recalls a melancholy impression:

May 2015. Cartagena by the Sea.

Every afternoon the Caribbean breezes blow through Bocagrande, throwing sand across the roads and footpaths, longing to remake sand dunes and undulations and a windswept landscape, moulded by winds and sun and salt and rain. The beach is not a real beach, it’s a subdued, repressed, domesticated strip of dirty sand, washed flat by

tides with tales to tell. But there's no-one to listen, for their ears are closed to the murmurs of the sea.

The beach at Bocagrande, I realised, reflects the culture that made it thus, a culture that violently oppresses nature. The work of Dunna and other grassroots NGOs are attempts to right the wrongs of culture that oppresses the human spirit through violence in its various forms, including warfare. The dedication of Dunna's directors and teachers, and PASO's leadership and extension workers are fresh breezes carrying freedom and kindness, blowing grains of peace into hearts and minds, remaking smiles and friendship and trust. Whilst in Colombia, I was repeatedly awed by these irrepressible breezes of peace, determined to blow away the oppression of the violent, war-ravaged decades. These cooling breezes arise from the people themselves, carrying the gift of peace into troubled communities with generosity and intelligence.

Dunna and PASO are but two examples. Travelling in Colombia, I realised that these green shoots and healing breezes are everywhere. I started developing an awareness of a grassroots peacebuilding movement that is expressed in an infinity of creative ways, just as a landscape recovering from the devastation of fire sends up myriad shoots signifying the unstoppable urge for life.

The research in this dissertation supports the hypothesis that a peacebuilding ecology (Amster, 2016, Goodman, 2012) reflecting principles of biological ecosystems occurs spontaneously in Colombian society. The biological principle that ecosystems self-repair in a process of creative regeneration following structural damage is observable in the proliferation of grassroots peacebuilding projects and NGOs evident in regions where high levels of violence by illegal armed actors has been experienced. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, communities that are vulnerable due to inadequacy or failure of state protection,

development, reconciliation, and reparations processes in regional Colombia attract illegal armed actors (akin to destructive invasive species) and/or proactive peacebuilding NGOs (akin to pioneering, restorative plants and other organisms).

Considering this, it makes sense for top-down institutions, including the media, to support and encourage the healthy growth of grassroots organisations. A vigorous grassroots peacebuilding “understorey” channels positive expression of community creativity and energy independent of a polarised and shifting political landscape. The result is stronger, healthier, more prosperous communities with increased resilience to the violent, destructive elements of Colombian society which continue to threaten peace with justice.

The research was limited by various factors. The language barrier of studying a Spanish-speaking country presents a major limitation, particularly to accessing local media reporting. Spanish language media reports on the case study NGOs would have been of particular interest to gauge the degree of local recognition of such projects. Interviews and field trips would also expand the depth of the research but were beyond the scope of this dissertation. Further analysis of the hypothesis would benefit from local fieldwork and assistance in identifying relevant Spanish language documents for translation.

In conclusion, recognising the emergence and characteristics of a peacebuilding ecology in Colombian society as a natural, inevitable process enhances understanding of how a sustainable transition to full peace can optimally be achieved. The existential environmental crisis facing life on earth is revealing an identity crisis in humanity regarding its place in nature. Developing understandings of individual and social actions, behaviours, and emotions in the peacebuilding context as inherently grounded in natural systems can help restore human identity and relationship with life-affirming, regenerative natural processes. By recognising the transformative power of encounters with the creativity, resilience and

dynamism of such phenomena, the opportunity to flourish as part of an organic and positive continuum in life's expression of itself can be embraced.

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